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Statement submitted by National Council of Women of Malta, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The National Council of Women Malta has been carrying out various studies based on the Beijing Platform for Action twelve themes. The studies include an analysis of the local situation in various fields and the sharing of good practice at the European Union level with different stakeholders including representatives of Employers, Trade Unions and a wide range of Non-Governmental Organizations. The proposals are presented first and foremost to the Government. 2015 is an important year for Women and Girls as the Beijing Platform for Action celebrates 20 years offering commitment and actions.

The National Council of Women Malta would like to see a Gender-responsive budget in Malta. This is a government planning, programming and budgeting exercise that contributes to the advancement of gender equality and the fulfilment of women's rights.

It entails identifying and reflecting needed interventions to address gender gaps in sector and local government policies, plans and budgets. It also aims to analyse the gender-differentiated impact of revenue-raising policies and the allocation of domestic resources and Official Development Assistance. Gender-responsive budget initiatives seek to create enabling policy frameworks, build capacity and strengthen monitoring mechanisms to support accountability to women.

The Beijing Platform for Action states that all economic policies must be gender-mainstreamed. To promote women's economic independence and rights, we need more female participation in the labour market. Although the government has introduced free childcare in Malta, several fiscal incentives and training opportunities to encourage women to enter the labour market are needed as Malta is still with a female participation rate lower than the European Union average. A comprehensive review of flexibility measures are required in particular in the private sector, to ensure that measures aim at adapting organization of time to an individual's life cycle such as: youth, raising a family and old age can be accommodated. There is also the question of non-transferable parental leave; the evaluation of current and past financial incentives, family-friendly measures and Life Long Learning programmes and skills training for those who wish to join the labour market.

Female Entrepreneurship encounters a number of issues that require addressing. These are: the age at which a female starts a business, a One Stop Shop for female Entrepreneurs, as well as an Act similar to the HR5050 Women Business Ownership Act. It is recommended that entrepreneurship is introduced to young students so as to acquaint themselves with this concept and that a Gender-responsive Investment tool be established.

Addressing the gender gap in Science and Technology. The following needs to be addressed: Changing the Practice of Research Grant Evaluations; Promoting Women Researchers through individual coaching, mentoring training in particular before application, preparation for interview; Addressing barriers to access to PhD levels for women; Ensuring that equality plans are in place and Creating linkages between University and Business to understand better in which areas they can collaborate to promote female researchers.

Addressing undeclared work as informal work deprives workers of their social protection and deprives society of taxes and social security contributions. It also increases the likelihood of poverty. Government should introduce legal solutions, including provisions in the areas of tax, social insurance, labour law and civil law and draw up advice and recommendations for employers while making them commonly available. Raising awareness and promoting information/training on the obligations and rights of employers and workers, especially where schemes exist will encourage these workers to regularize their activities.

Women and Health: Addressing the challenges of demography with public health capacity for gender specific research on how diseases affect women. Invest in new technology with the aim of improving the efficiency of the health workforce, the management of the outbreak and potential of epidemic diseases, and health care in general. We need affordable and quality health care that takes into account the specific needs of women and girls.

Domestic Violence can benefit from an Inter-ministerial Action Plan for the early detection and prevention by creating a bigger pool of professionals working in the field of domestic violence with adequate funding. There should be free specialisation of post graduate studies for professionals working in the field of domestic violence. Adequate programmes for the police force as key actors in reducing and eliminating domestic violence. Prevention and awareness raising programmes of domestic violence through campaigns for youth, the disabled and vulnerable women and girls are also necessary. There are other elements that need monitoring such as forced child marriage, trafficking and female genital mutilation. The procedure of Female Genital Mutilation constitutes a brutal form of gender-based violence against girls and women and a serious violation of fundamental human rights. Midwives practicing in Malta are now being more frequently called upon to assist women who have undergone Female Genital Mutilation. In this developing scenario, the Malta Midwives Association feels it should raise public awareness on the subject. Midwives are encouraged to respect the dignity of the female body and refrain from supporting and participating in any way in genital mutilation practices.

Addressing the needs of migrant women: Every year the number of women migrants is increasing, which makes it necessary, to protect these women, through clear gender-sensitive guidelines. Studies need to be carried out to measure the potential of women migrants contribution to the economy and guarantee suitable employment whilst monitoring migrant women in undeclared work and if necessary offer training in employability skills.

Women are Powerful Agents for Peace and Security and all countries should develop a National Action Plan relative to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 which covers three interrelated themes: participation of women at all levels of decision making in conflict resolutions and peace building; protection of women's and girls' rights and the gender dimension of peace operations.

Women in political decision-making Assemblies and Company Boards are still under represented in Malta. The National Council of Women Malta urges political parties to rethink their strategies and adopt action plans for recruiting an equal number of women and men as candidates for 'winnable seats' and in general, for making party politics more inclusive.

The principle of capitalising on the potential of all individuals (over 50 per cent women) in decision-making should be the foundation for any decisions to be taken in the immediate future and the next step to be taken by political parties is to introduce more concrete measures to ensure a mass of at least 30 per cent participation of women in the House of Representatives to be realistically effective in the decision making process of our political system.

With the new technology and better communication facilities and better training, more women can be recruited in managerial roles which will provide a balanced media output and eliminate stereotype portrayals of women. Women are still under represented in the decision-making structures of media organizations. There is the need to promote more variety of female role models with the true picture of their skills and their contribution to society. Gender Equality for the Media should start from an early age using the education system in schools so that the next generation will have more female voices from across societies heard.

Women need an active role in matters of the Environment and Climate Change contributing in defining needs and finding solutions. They can also be part of the sustainable development scheme raising awareness of environmental health, renewable energy, access to food and water. The general public should be made aware of the need to reduce the consumption of Electricity and heat; Non-electric transport; Non-recycled material. Waste management and packaging including food waste are issues that have a great impact on women and strict legislation should be implemented. The change in climate will impact severely the Mediterranean basin with greater variability and extreme weather events. Climate change is expected to destabilize the hydrological cycle of the Mediterranean in which there is stressful demand on water resources. Extreme weather events such as heat waves and floods pose a direct risk to the health and safety of people, with the very young, the elderly, and the disabled and low-income households particularly vulnerable. Damage to property and infrastructure imposes heavy costs on society and the economy. Sectors that rely strongly on certain temperatures and precipitation levels, such as agriculture, forestry, energy and tourism, will be particularly affected. Women should be actively involved in environmental decision-making at all levels as we need to integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development.